



State of Tennessee Department of Children's Services

## **Administrative Policies and Procedures: 31.7**

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**Subject: Engaging Families**

**Supersedes: DCS 31.7, 05/01/03; DCS 31.8, 05/01/03; DCS 31.9, 05/01/03**

**Local Policy: No**

**Local Procedures: No**

**Training Required: No**

**Applicable Practice Model Standard(s): Yes**

**Approved by:**

**Effective date: 05/01/03**

**Revision date: 04/01/05**

### **Application**

To All Department of Children's Services (DCS) Employees and Private Provider Agencies

**Authority:**

Brian A. Settlement Agreement; TCA 37-5-106

### **Policy**

DCS case managers shall engage families in helping relationships that will support the achievement of safety, permanency and well-being for children. Fundamental to these relationships is a recognition and appreciation for the knowledge and strengths that all families and children possess and the significance of partnering with families in the development of plans of intervention. DCS staff will interact with families and children using culturally competent interpersonal skills, demonstrating genuineness, empathy and respect for the family and individuals. Relationships shall be characterized by behaviors and actions that impart respect for human dignity, full disclosure of information, inclusion in the decision-making process, and knowledge of the appropriate use of authority in serving families.

The Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) shall be the model utilized by DCS staff to engage families in the decision-making process throughout their relationship with the Department. This model will be utilized for the development of case plans and making permanency decisions as well as for addressing critical decisions around the placement of children.

## **Procedures**

### **A. Child and Family Team Meetings**

Each region will develop a timeline for implementation that will be included in their Regional Implementation Plan. At full implementation, CFTM's will take place at the following times/events:

1. Prior to the child's placement into custody, if the removal is due to a Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation (in situations where the child's safety is not assured), the meeting may take place following the child's placement into the Department's custody, preferably within twenty-four (24) hours, but always before the preliminary hearing.
2. For children who do not enter the Department's custody as a result of a CPS investigation, but through an unruly or delinquent determination by the court, the initial CFTM must occur within seven (7) days. It is preferable that this meeting takes place as soon as possible after the child's placement into custody.
3. Within fifteen (15) working days of the child's entry into state custody, a CFTM shall be held for the purposes of developing the permanency plan. The permanency planning CFTM should build upon the work done in the initial CFTM with the family. See DCS Policy [\*16.31-BA Permanency Planning For Children/Youth in Department of Children's Services Custody\*](#).
4. At six (6) months from the child's entry into state custody, a CFTM shall be held for the purpose of reviewing the child and family's progress towards permanency and prepare the child and family team for finalizing a permanency decision at the nine (9) month CFTM.
5. At nine (9) months from the child's entry into state custody, a CFTM shall be held for the purpose of finalizing a permanency decision for the child. The supervisor will play a significant role in this CFTM and shall be responsible for ensuring that the outcome of the meeting includes a realistic plan that will achieve the goal of return to parent within the next three months, or that an alternate plan for permanency is developed.
6. Prior to any change in placement, including a disruption, a CFTM shall be held to determine if the current placement is appropriate for the child and can be maintained. If additional supports cannot maintain the placement, then a plan should be developed to transition the child to their next placement.

7. A CFTM shall be held if the team is considering changing a child's permanency goal. The purpose of this meeting is to engage the child and family in assessing the appropriateness of continuing the current permanency goal and in determining an alternate permanency goal, if necessary.
8. A CFTM shall be held at any time a revision to the child's permanency plan is needed. The purpose of this CFTM is to revise or complete an annual update to a permanency plan.
9. A CFTM shall be held prior to discharge/return to parent to evaluate the appropriateness of the child's return to parent or discharge from custody to an alternate permanency option and to plan for the child and family's transition. This CFTM shall occur at least ten (10) days prior to the beginning of the Trial Home Visit or discharge from custody.
10. Any member of the child and family team may initiate a CFTM to address an issue or concern that has arisen. The purpose of this CFTM is to pull together only the members of the child and family team necessary to address the concern(s).

**B. Participation**

1. DCS staff shall plan Child and Family Team Meetings for times and locations that are convenient to the family and child(ren)/youth.
  - a) Efforts shall be made to schedule the meeting by consensus.
  - b) The setting should be conducive to discussion of family issues.
  - c) The DCS Case Manager must also assess any safety concerns, such as domestic violence or the issues to be discussed in the meeting, when determining an appropriate location.
2. DCS shall provide services to support the participation of parents and relatives in Child and Family Team Meetings. Such services may include transportation, childcare, interpreter services, and any other services that would support the family's participation.

**C. Attendance****1. Child/Youth**

- a) Participation is mandatory if child/youth is 12 years of age or older.
- b) Consideration shall be given to safety and emotional issues as they relate to having parents and children/youth together at all child and family team meetings. Staff shall assess this issue on a case-by-case basis and provide alternative means of participation if the child/youth's best interest warrants their exclusion.
- c) Younger children, as appropriate, should be included for part, if not all, of the child and family team meeting.

**3. Parents (including legal, biological and alleged fathers)**

- a) Unless a parent's rights have been terminated or surrendered, the Department must include all known parents, including legal, biological and alleged fathers, in Child and Family Team Meetings.
- b) The Department shall conduct diligent searches throughout the life of the case if there are any unidentified parents, or the Department does not know their whereabouts. Efforts to locate parents should be clearly documented in the case record.
- c) The incarcerated parent must be included in Child and Family Team Meetings, whenever possible and appropriate. They shall be encouraged to participate in the plan and meet their parental responsibilities, including, but not limited to, corresponding with the Department and the child/youth, contributing to the child/youth's support, participating in available services to assure safety, permanency and well-being and helping to formulate a realistic plan for the child/youth's care.

**4. Child's Case Manager**

- ◆ Regardless of who facilitates any child and family team meeting, the child's assigned case manager must be in attendance.

**5. Resource Parents**

- ◆ Resource parents with DCS or a contract agency are crucial members of the child and family team. Every effort should be made to ensure their full participation in

CFTM's.

6. Child and Family Team Meetings shall also involve, to the extent possible the following individuals:
  - a) Specialized DCS staff persons, as needed, shall be included to support the work of the child and family team. These may include, but are not limited to, Full-Time Facilitators, Education Specialists, Health Unit Members, Juvenile Justice Staff, DCS Legal Staff, and Adoption Liaisons. Every effort should be made to ensure the same Full-Time facilitator, is utilized throughout the life of the case.
  - b) Extended family members and other support persons as defined by the family
  - c) Therapists and/or contract agency staff involved in providing services to the child/youth, family, and/or other identified permanency option.
  - d) Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Volunteer
  - e) Community Partners to include support persons to the family identified by the Department. Their involvement is subject to the parent(s) consent
  - f) Attorneys, to include the guardian ad litem and the attorney for the child/youth's parents
  - g) Interpreter, as needed

**D. Format for the  
Child & Family  
Team Meeting**

The Child and Family Team Meetings shall, to the extent possible, include the following activities:

1. Introductions
  - ◆ The facilitator will engage the group in introducing all persons present and identifying the purpose and goal of the meeting.
2. Establishing Ground Rules
  - a) The facilitator shall help the group to develop and agree on ground rules for the meeting to manage emotions and keep the meeting focused on the outcome (e.g., speaking one at a time, using appropriate language and tone).
  - b) The role of the Department and its responsibility for safety and permanency should also be made clear to the group.
  - c) Confidentiality and family privacy will be discussed.

3. Identify the Situation & Encourage Meaningful Child & Family Participation.
  - a) To the greatest extent possible, DCS shall support the child and parents/caregivers in sharing their story related to their current situation and in defining their underlying needs and desired outcomes.
  - b) The strengths and needs of the family should be identified, as well as any safety issues that must be successfully addressed in any plan.
4. Identify Solutions to the underlying Conditions
  - ◆ The group should brainstorm ways to meet the underlying needs of the family while maintaining safety and working towards timely permanency for the child.
5. Develop the Plan/Reach a Decision
  - a) The group will develop a plan to meet the underlying needs and achieve the desired outcomes of the meeting.
  - b) The goal of the team should be reaching consensus on a plan that the family and the Department can support.
  - c) To every extent possible, families should play a significant role in the development of plans/decisions. The Department must remain open to the ideas of families, while owning the responsibility for safety, well-being, and permanency.
6. Troubleshooting Potential Setbacks
  - ◆ The team should assess what might go wrong with the plan and determine who will notify the Department if a particular step in the plan fails. The team might also develop a contingency plan should the initial plan of the group be unsuccessful. Otherwise, the team will have to reconvene to determine the next step(s).
7. Closing/Recapping the Meeting
  - a) The facilitator should review with the group the plan that has been developed recapping each task, as well as the responsible party for the task(s) and the assigned timeframes.
  - b) The team should schedule any necessary follow up

meetings.

- c) The facilitator should close the meeting by thanking the team members for participating.

8. Documenting the Plan

- a) The plan developed in the CFTM, including the assigned tasks and responsibilities of each participant shall be reviewed and signed by the participating team members at closing.
- b) In CFTM's that are held for the purpose of developing a permanency plan, the permanency plan will serve as the written plan for the CFTM.
- c) For those CFTM's that do not result in the development of a permanency plan, the plan should be documented on the *Staffing Summary and Placement Justification* form.
- d) The written agreement shall be copied and distributed to the meeting participants.

**E. Documenting the Team's Work**

- 1. The meeting and outcomes, as well as permanency plans (if developed), shall be documented in TNKids.
- 2. Form CS-0230, *Staffing Summary and Placement Justification* or form CS-0577, *Permanency Plan* will be maintained in the child/youth's case file.

**Forms**

CS-0230	Staffing Summary and Placement Justification
CS-0577	Permanency Plan

**Collateral Documents**

*None*

**Standards**

DCS Practice Model Standard-5-201

DCS Practice Model Standard-5-202  
DCS Practice Model Standard-5-203  
DCS Practice Model Standard-5-204  
DCS Practice Model Standard-5-401  
DCS Practice Model Standard-5-402  
DCS Practice Model Standard-5-500  
DCS Practice Model Standard-6-507B

## **Glossary**

<b><i>Term</i></b>	<b><i>Definition</i></b>
<b><i>Full-Time Facilitator:</i></b>	A DCS Employee who's full-time role at the agency is the facilitation of Child & Family Team Meetings and the coaching and mentoring of staff in their professional development on CFTM. The Full-Time facilitator has completed the core curriculum on Child & Family Team Meetings, the advanced curriculum on facilitating Child & Family Team Meetings, passed the skills based competency exam and met the minimum threshold for competency on their structured observations.